

Conference Paper

Psychosemantic Research into the Phenomenon of Risk

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Abstract

The psychological aspect of risk constitutes one of the most discussed issues of modern interdisciplinary research. The profession of the psychologist implies a range of situations of risk for a specialist at various stages of career development. This article presents the results of a psychosemantics research into perceptions of the phenomenon of risk as seen by the students of the Department of Psychology. The findings clarify the peculiarities of the semantic sphere regarding the risks at the initial stage of acquiring the profession. The research was conducted in 2017. The sample comprised 60 students of the Department of Psychology. This research was based on the semantic differential technique modified by I.L. Solomin. We altered and extended the list of objects in accordance with the research goals. The results were processed by means of cluster and factor analysis. The analysis of individual clustering trees revealed rather significant semantic variability between the researched objects. A few subgroups of respondents were distinguished according to the individual peculiarities of semantic fields regarding the object 'risk'. With the help of factor analysis, the specifics of the affective attitude toward the object 'risk' were determined for both the whole sample and the individual subgroups of respondents. The psychosemantics approach completes the picture of the study into the psychological aspect of risk in professional activity and enables to identify the topics, which clarify the subtle nuances of the meaning of the notion 'risk' in the conscience of a specialist. Thus, there are vagueness and ambiguity of the subjective view of risk by psychology students, ambivalence of the affective attitude to risk, and a range of semantic subgroups toward the notion 'risk'.

Keywords: risk, professional risk, psychology of risk, risks of a psychology-related profession, situation of risk, subjective perception of risk, students, psychosemantics approach, semantic differential technique, semantic field

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1. Introduction

The psychology of risk is a relatively new and perspective direction at the interface of modern personality psychology and acmeology [1, 2, 4]. The types, factors and situations of risks for a number of professions have been studied based on the examples of professional risks [1, 9, 10]. Most of the research is devoted to risk as a phenomenon of the external environment [3, 12, 14]. A little less attention has been paid to the subjective perception of risk and the degree of professionals' awareness of it [2, 5]. The phenomenological research has shown an imbalance between intensive discussions of the importance of risk consideration in some scientific publications and the absence of reference to the phenomenon of risk in any professional Internet-communities [6]. In other words, the notion of risk is rather vague and mixed with such notions as 'problem' or 'crisis' in the conscience of professional psychologists [4, 6].

The objective of this research was to determine subjective perceptions of risk from the perspective of respondents at the early stage of professional education.

2. Method

The research was conducted in 2017 and involved the Department of Psychology in the Ural Federal University. The sample comprised 60 students ranging from the 1st to the 5th year of education. The semantic differential technique modified by I.L. Solomin [13] was used as the main method. The list of objects was altered and extended in accordance with the research goals.

The psychosemantics approach allows us to identify implicit views of risk in the conscience of the subjects and to detect the peculiarities of subjective views of risk itself [7, 8, 15]. The study of semantic fields in regard to the researched object explains the mechanisms of its understanding and identification. The analysis of affective perceptions of the phenomenon of risk is principle for forming the riskological competence in a future specialist.

There are several stages of this research: (1) the study of conscious views about risks implied by the profession of the psychologist by means of a written survey; (2) the analysis of individual clustering trees and outlining the main semantic subgroups in terms of the notion 'risk'; (3) the determination of affective intensity of the factors by C. Osgood in relation to the object 'risk' for both the whole sample and the individual subgroups of respondents.

The survey of the students on the topic of 'Risks in the Profession of the Psychologist' has proved uncertainty in this matter for the majority of the subjects. The students asked follow-up questions, enumerated a limited number of risks, experienced difficulty in distinguishing the notions 'risk' and 'problem'. The majority listed external risks connected with the lack of knowledge and skills for fulfilling professional objectives.

3. Results

The analysis of clustering trees revealed high individual variability of semantic connections between the researched objects. The cluster analysis data consolidation enabled us to classify the results into 6 main groups regarding the notion 'risk'. The most numerous is the group, in which the object 'risk' is not clearly presented and exists on the periphery of the clustering tree (36%), which corresponds with the results of the preliminary survey of the students.

The rest of the clustering trees distributed in the following way:

1. In 22% of all cases, the object risk is semantically close to the objects, indicating some activities, for instance, 'my profession', 'my studies', 'my career', 'my work', 'psychology', 'performing the duties', 'an interesting activity'.
2. In 18% of all cases, the object 'risk' is close to the notions, denoting personal peculiarities. The notion 'risk' is close in meaning to the notion 'will', 'I', 'personal addiction', 'responsibility', 'profit', 'sexuality', 'recognition by surrounding people'.
3. A separate subgroup (10%) is comprised of those clustering trees, in which the object 'risk' is close in meaning to life stages – 'my past', 'my future', 'my present'.
4. 7% of all clustering trees include the notion 'risk' along with the characteristics of some social groups such as 'teachers', 'groupmates'.
5. In 7% of all cases, we can see a close connection with such notions as 'hardship', 'stress', 'failure', 'illness'.

According to the cluster analysis data, the object 'risk' is represented individually in the conscience of respondents and is connected implicitly with various groups of objects. The subjective view of risk is vague and non-differentiated for many individuals. This fact correlates with the early stage of familiarization with the profession and indicates the existence of priority objects unrelated to risks in the conscience of respondents. Risk is rarely viewed as a negative object. For the majority of students,

TABLE 1: The results of the common factor analysis ($n = 60$).

	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5
Sad-happy	-0.91	0.10	0.04	-0.09	0.01
Deep-shallow	0.07	0.36	-0.37	0.58	-0.33
Cold-hot	-0.18	-0.62	0.28	0.01	0.02
Pleasant-unpleasant	0.90	-0.11	0.03	0.14	-0.03
Heavy-light	-0.42	0.00	-0.72	0.04	-0.26
Slow-fast	-0.20	-0.21	-0.16	0.01	-0.61
Bitter-sweet	-0.76	0.00	-0.16	-0.12	0.01
Strong-weak	0.02	0.36	0.00	0.63	0.46
Calm-rapid	0.11	-0.69	0.11	-0.02	-0.05
Good-bad	0.72	0.15	0.06	0.26	0.23
Small-big	-0.32	0.00	0.67	-0.43	-0.30
Active-passive	-0.17	-0.05	0.01	0.11	0.77
Dirty-clean	-0.38	0.22	-0.08	-0.53	0.12
Soft-hard	0.14	-0.64	-0.10	0.17	-0.37
Energetic-languid	0.30	0.40	-0.14	-0.22	0.53
Beautiful-ugly	0.42	0.03	-0.05	0.61	0.04
Tender-harsh	0.26	-0.25	0.57	0.43	0.12
Sharp-blunt	-0.09	0.72	0.20	0.30	0.07
Factor. Rate	0.20	0.13	0.09	0.11	0.11

Note: The bold type indicates relevant factor indexes (> 0.70).

risk accompanies external or internal activity, including those which occur at different life stages.

Let us consider the affective tendencies in perceptions of risk based on the whole sample and the individual subgroups according to the factor analysis data. As can be seen in Table 1, the attitude to the object 'risk' is represented by 5 factors in the conscience of the subjects, the first of which corresponds to the evaluation factor by C. Osgood. The factor has a slightly bigger factor rate and includes such scales as 'sad', 'unpleasant', 'bitter', 'bad'. The factor 'potency' by C. Osgood is divided into 3 sub-factors: 'blunt', 'light', 'weak'. The factor of activity is represented by the scale 'passive'.

In other words, students generally regard risk with certain degree of distaste. However, risk is considered as something not concerning them, having no influence and posing no threat. In our opinion, the factor analysis data clarifies the overall picture of perceptions of the risks in the group of students.

The factor analysis of the results in certain semantic subgroups presented a number of peculiarities: (1) In the subgroups 'activity' and 'the object unidentified' the factor

TABLE 2: The results of factor analysis in group 6 'the object non-represented' ($n = 22$).

	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5
Sad-happy	0.94	0.11	-0.02	0.04	0.04
Deep-shallow	0.10	0.32	0.61	-0.55	-0.19
Cold-hot	0.12	-0.84	0.03	0.12	-0.09
Pleasant-unpleasant	-0.93	-0.05	0.12	0.07	-0.10
Heavy-light	0.18	0.00	-0.14	-0.87	-0.29
Slow-fast	0.18	0.02	0.13	-0.08	-0.87
Bitter-sweet	0.93	-0.01	-0.15	-0.04	0.04
Strong-weak	0.27	0.21	0.52	-0.15	0.62
Calm-rapid	-0.46	-0.70	-0.18	-0.21	-0.23
Good-bad	-0.81	0.28	0.20	0.04	0.19
Small-big	0.12	0.11	-0.14	0.79	-0.27
Active-passive	0.14	0.24	0.00	0.04	0.67
Dirty-clean	0.25	0.26	-0.72	0.13	0.11
Soft-hard	-0.49	-0.44	-0.06	-0.53	-0.32
Energetic-languid	-0.18	0.80	-0.24	0.12	0.05
Beautiful-ugly	-0.23	-0.12	0.76	0.03	0.09
Tender-harsh	-0.23	0.08	0.64	0.48	-0.09
Sharp-blunt	0.27	0.47	0.48	0.10	0.20
Factor. Rate	0.23	0.15	0.14	0.13	0.11

Note: The bold type indicates relevant factor indexes (> 0.70).

evaluation has a positive connotation. Risk is viewed as 'happy', 'beautiful', 'light' and 'sweet'. (2) In the subgroup 'activity' the potency factor is represented maximally – 'deep', 'hot', 'big', 'harsh'. (3) Negative perceptions of risk are typical of the representatives of the subgroup 'personal peculiarities' and 'life stages'. (4) In the subgroup 'personal peculiarities' risk is perceived as something passive and meaningless. (5) In the subgroups 'social groups' and 'the negative' risk is associated with utmost activity – 'active', 'rapid', 'fast', 'hot'.

The factor analysis of the results of the subgroup, in which 'risk' is not clearly defined, is presented in Table 2. The students with a vague perception of risk consider this object rather ambivalently: attractive (Factor 1) and ugly (Factor 3), passive (Factor 2 and Factor 5) and strong (Factor 4).

The psychosemantics research into risk has shown vagueness and ambiguity of the subjective view of risk by psychology students. The majority of respondents do not notice the presence of some risky situations in their daily life. The attitude to risk is mostly evaluative. Risk is not seen as an active and strong factor in professional

activity. These results prove the necessity of further research into the subjective view of risk as a constituent of riskological culture of future specialists.

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